combating crime and terrorism. Both countries have stated that they would not allow their territory to be used for activities inimical to the interests of either country. Measures have been taken to enhance co-operation with Nepal, including in the field of intelligence and effective border management. A bilateral institutional mechanism has been evolved which includes a Joint Working Group on Border Management, Home Secretary Level Talks and Bilateral Consultative Group on Security Issues to jointly address issues relating to maintenance of peace and security and prevention of criminal activities in the India-Nepal border areas. The two Governments are in the process of finalising an Agreement on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters and an updated Extradition Treaty. Regular dialogue of Customs officials also takes place under the Agreement for Cooperation to control Unauthorised Trade. The Special Service Bureau has been deployed at all sensitive places along the border with Nepal to strengthen security in the border areas.

So far as Bhutan is concerned, no incidence of ISI's direct involvement has come to the notice of the Government of India.

Indo-Russian cooperation in private sectors

†1024. SHRIMATI SAVITA SHARDA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether a decision has been taken between India and Russia regarding cooperation in private sector;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether there is any proposal to establish Indo-Russia trade center for the above purpose; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) and (b) Private sector companies and entrepreneurs of India and Russia have been engaged in healthy trade and investment cooperation. Almost the entire bilateral trade between India and Russia today takes place through private agencies. Hon'ble Prime Minister visited Russia from 11-13 November 2003 along with more than ninety businessmen in order to, *inter alia*, promote this interaction. Both countries have agreed to take a number

of measures for further facilitating mutually beneficial contacts between their businesspersons. These include encouraging more regular business exchanges, participation in each other's trade exhibitions, diversification of areas of trade and investment and reinvigorating the Joint Business Council. The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has reopened its office in Moscow. CII and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) are being encouraged to develop institutional arrangements for trade promotion and information-sharing with their Russian counterparts.

(c) No.

(d) Does not arise.

Discouraging Muttah Marriage

1025. SHRI MURLI DEORA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have written to all embassies in the country to discourage Muttah Marriage on payment;

(b) if so, the details thereof and number of such cases which came to Government's notice;

(c) whether such practice is violative of the Immoral Traffic Act; and

(d) the measures Government propose to take to nip this evil in the bud?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) to (d) Indian Diplomatic Missions in the Gulf countries had been instructed to discretely monitor those seeking visas to ascertain the genuineness of the intended purpose of the visit. Recently they have been once again instructed to keep a close watch on this issue. The Embassies of the Gulf countries in India have also been appraised of the problems during regular interactions. Relevant laws that are violated by Muttah Marriage practice are being ascertained so that the concerned authorities could take appropriate action. It would be useful to encourage NGOs working in this field to play a parallel proactive role to discourage/eliminate this evil.